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Professions of faith in Byzantium in the 13th-14th centuries: some preliminary considerations

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COLLÈGE DE FRANCE – CNRS
CENTRE DE RECHERCHE D'HISTOIRE
ET CIVILISATION DE BYZANCE

MONOGRAPHIES 51

L'UNION À L'ÉPREUVE DU FORMULAIRE
PROFESSIONS DE FOI
ENTRE ÉGLISES D'ORIENT ET D'OCCIDENT
(XIII^e-XVIII^e SIÈCLE)

édité par
Marie-Hélène BLANCHET
&
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PEETERS
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PROFESSIONS OF FAITH IN BYZANTIUM

IN THE 13th–14th CENTURIES

SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Luigi SILVANO

I. WHAT IS A PROFESSION OF FAITH?

It was quite a routine event for Byzantine emperors, patriarchs, and bishops to make public statements (which they sometimes had to reiterate) about their personal piety and devotion, in connection to both their private conduct and their public activity. Ecclesiastics were asked to read their own on the occasion of their ordination and at subsequent career steps, or to sign collective professions when taking part in synods and councils.¹ Emperors had to sign a profession of faith prior to coronation, the layout of which has come to us thanks to the ceremonial book by Pseudo-Kodinos;² imperial confessions of faith also marked important steps in the political and ecclesiastical history of Byzantium, as in the notorious cases of the unionist confessions of Michael VIII and John V.³ Moreover, a certain number of professions by private citizens has survived. Nonetheless, despite the ubiquitous presence of such declarations of faith in the life of the

1. On professions as ecclesiastical documents see J. DARROUZÈS, *Recherches sur les ὁμολογίες de l'Église byzantine* (AOC 11), Paris 1970, here pp. 444–50. As observed by Darrouzès, “du point de vue canonique, aux yeux de l'Église, cette profession est l'équivalent du serment que la loi civile admet et que des canons interdisent aux clercs” (p. 443); this oath implied fidelity to both the orthodox faith and the Church (p. 448). For an almost complete anthology of *regulae fidei*, Creed formulas and professions of faith of individuals up to the 7th century see the *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, hrsg. von A. HAHN und G. L. HAHN, Breslau 1897 (repr. Hildesheim 1962). On the tradition of Greek professions of faith see also M. KOHLBACHER, *Das Symbolum Athanasianum und die orientalische Bekenntnistradition : Formgeschichtliche Anmerkungen*, in *Syriaca II : Beiträge zum 3. deutschen Syrologen Symposium in Vierzehnheiligen 2002*, hrsg. von M. TAMCKE (Studien zur orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 33), Münster 2004, pp. 105–64.

2. PSEUDO-KODINOS, *Traité des offices*, introd., texte et trad. par J. VERPEAUX, Paris 1966, here pp. 252–4; see also R. MACRIDES, J. A. MUNITIZ and D. ANGELOV, *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan court : offices and ceremonies* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman studies 15), Farnham – Burlington 2013, pp. 212–4.

3. On the professions of Michael VIII and of his son Andronikos II, I refer the reader to L. PIERALLI, *La corrispondenza diplomatica dell'imperatore bizantino con le potenze estere nel tredicesimo secolo (1204–1282). Studio storico-diplomatico ed edizione critica*, Città del Vaticano 2006, nos. 12, 13, 20, 26 (Michael VIII), 16, 21, 27 (Andronikos II). Other professions relevant to the study of the Union of Lyons are of course those by John Bekkos, dealt with in the present volume by E. RAGIA, *Confessions of an ingenious man : the confessions of faith of John XI Bekkos in their social, political and theological background*, pp. 39–75. On the profession of John V, see in the present volume the chapter by L. PIERALLI, *Un imperatore di Bisanzio a Roma : la professione di fede di Giovanni V Paleologo*, pp. 97–143.

Byzantines and the considerable amount of written documentation thereon, this issue has not received proper attention so far, as demonstrated by the lack of general studies and of reliable editions of several texts.

But what exactly is a profession of faith? When I was invited to reflect on Byzantine professions of faith on the occasion of the Paris symposium that led to the publication of this book, I thought that answering this question would be easier than it has indeed proved to be. In fact, the difficulties turned out to be remarkable as soon as I had to cope with the necessity of circumscribing the borders of this genre (if there is one), or at least to provide a broadly acceptable definition of this particular form of writing within the panorama of Byzantine literature. This resulted in a puzzling undertaking for several reasons. First, the Byzantines themselves seem uncertain on how to term this literary production, as is evident when considering the absence of a universally accepted nomenclature to denote such texts. Besides ὁμολογία (πίστεως), corresponding to the Latin *confessio* or *professio* (*fidei*), the most widely attested designations are λιβέλ(λ)ος (from the Latin *libellus*), which at least from the 4th century onwards was meant as “written statement of Orthodoxy,”⁴ and ἐκθεσις (τῆς πίστεως; Latin *expositio*), “exposition.”⁵ However, it is not infrequent to come across texts that one could define as professions of faith, and that perhaps are labelled as such in some manuscripts, but in other manuscripts are introduced by titles such as “treatise,” “epistle,” “catechism” etc., as we shall see. By the same token, the designation “profession of faith” can occasionally be given in manuscripts to *florilegia* of dogmatic-theological content, or to short treatises on the development of the orthodox dogma and the history of the Church;⁶ this has to do with the fact that all this literature conveys much of the same kind of information as professions in the same concise, assertive and authoritative way.

To focus on our object of study, a set of preliminary considerations must be taken into account. Perhaps it may be useful to introduce them with a working definition, which I will borrow from Aristeides Papadakis:

Confessions—formal statements of doctrines made by an individual or individuals—are as old as Christianity itself. It is generally agreed that the difference between a confession and a Creed is that

4. See G. W. H. LAMPE, *A patristic Greek lexicon*, Oxford 1961–8, s.v. This technical meaning of the word is however not registered in the lexica of medieval and modern Greek (see e.g. those by Sophocles, Demetrakos, Kriaras, Lavagnini – Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici), where the word is mainly explained as an equivalent of “petition” (as in classical Greek: see H. J. LIDDEL, R. SCOTT, H. S. JONES, *A Greek-English lexicon*, Oxford 1995, s.v.) and “accusation,” “act of accusation” (these two meanings are recorded in LAMPE, *A patristic Greek lexicon*, s.v.; cf. C. DU CANGE, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae Graecitatis*, Lugduni 1688, s.v.: “scriptum quodvis, libellus, praesertim accusationis”); other registered meanings are “publication,” “memorial,” “pamphlet,” as well as “outrageous publication” (the LBG [*Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts*, erstellt von E. TRAPP *et al.*, Wien 1994–] only contemplates the lemma λιβέλος, ὁ, glossed “Haarbüschel, Quaste,” i.e. “tuft of hair”; no mention of the other form λιβέλλος is made, though there are lemmata devoted to the form λιβέλλικός and to the Latin borrowings λιβελλάριον and λιβελλήσιος).

5. The word is often used with the meaning of “Creed” and in reference to doctrinal formulations: see LAMPE, *A patristic Greek lexicon* (quoted n. 4), s.v.

6. This is the case, for instance, with some opuscles on the ecumenical councils mentioned by F. DVORNIK, *The Photian schism: history and legend*, Cambridge 1948, pp. 455–6. The label of “profession of faith” may be applied, according to some scholars, to liturgical texts as well: see M. METZGER, L’écoute vaut plus que le sacrifice (1 Samuel 15, 22), in *Liturgies in East and West: ecumenical relevance of early liturgical development: acts of the International Symposium Vindobonense I, Vienna, November 17–20, 2007*, ed. by H.-J. FEULNER (Österreichische Studien zur Liturgiewissenschaft und Sakramententheologie 6), Wien – Berlin 2013, pp. 275–84, here p. 283.

*a Creed is almost always briefer and less comprehensive than the long and more systematic exposition of faith of a confession.*⁷

Papadakis insists on aspects such as structure and contents, and correctly establishes a distinction between a Creed and a profession, the latter consisting in a more detailed treatment of the Christian doctrine. A necessary corollary to this definition is that many professions contain the Creed or are modeled on it, to such an extent that the two terms are sometimes treated as synonyms.⁸ But this is not always the case (see, e.g., among those dealt with in this volume, that of Theodora Palaiologina),⁹ and this remark introduces us to an aspect that should be taken into consideration before any attempt is made at defining such a literary production: the variety of forms that declarations of faith can assume, with regard to length, elaborateness and the amount of information provided, but also to structure, aims and language, as the following notes will hopefully illustrate.

Besides positive confessions, i.e. Creed-like lists of the dogmas that a good Christian must profess, there are negative confessions, that is confessions which deny those beliefs and practices rejected by the Church, and which may include *anathemata* cast upon heterodox doctrines, persons, and groups of persons as well. The two forms, positive and negative, may coexist in the same text.

Most professions are highly conventional and standardized in contents, format and language, and merely repeat the Creed's articles, with possible changes as to the wording and the order of items; these may be followed by further statements concerning issues such as the veneration of icons, the validity of councils, the respect due to the hierarchy, the other world, the *Filioque*, papal primacy, azymes, liturgical usages and so on. There are also professions concerned with only one article or some articles in particular (e.g., see below the one by Patriarch Joseph I of Constantinople). In the majority of cases, professions would not include original additions on the part of their signers.¹⁰ Exceptions are represented by some professions authored by outstanding personalities (such as those we will examine in the following), which often introduce synopses of their authors' doctrine and teaching, and in some cases assume the form of a self-apology or of a pamphlet directed against adversaries and opponents.

Professions may or may not reflect contemporary events and dogmatical controversies. For instance, in 1343 Patriarch John XIV Kalekas decided that the confessions that were customarily subscribed by newly elected bishops should contain an anti-Palamite statement; this was substituted with a Palamite profession in 1347 by order of Patriarch Isidoros I

7. A. PAPADAKIS, Gregory Palamas at the council of Blachernae, 1351, *GRBS* 10, 1969, pp. 333–42, here p. 336.

8. E.g., according to G.-H. BAUDRY, *Le baptême et ses symboles : aux sources du salut* (Le point théologique 59), Paris 2001, p. 3, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is “the most famous profession of faith.” As L. Cunningham points out (L. CUNNINGHAM, *An introduction to Catholicism*, Cambridge – New York 2009, p. 142), “every great council of the Church, when the bishops gather together in solemn deliberation, makes the Creed a part of their deliberations either by formulating a Creed or by including it as a sign of their common faith”; however, if it is true that “the Creed [...] was not only a profession of faith but also a confession of praise and, in that sense, a prayer,” this cannot apply to professions of faith as a whole.

9. Newly edited by E. MITSIOU, *Regaining the true faith : the confession of faith of Theodora Palaiologina*, in this volume, pp. 77–96.

10. This explains why only a fraction of the professions pronounced by patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops on the occasion of their accession has been preserved: as has been pointed out by DARROUZÈS, *Recherches sur les ὁμολογίες* (quoted n. 1), pp. 448–9, official records often contain the mention that an orthodox profession of faith has been delivered by someone, omitting to report *in extenso* the profession's text.

Bucheiras.¹¹ Yet the teaching of Palamas and the ensuing quarrel go unmentioned not only in the almost contemporary confession written by the well-known jurist Constantine Harmenopoulos, but also in that composed in 1361 by Andreas Libadenos, *chartophylax* of the metropolitan church of Trebizond.¹²

Professions often explicitly refer to a selection of authoritative texts: the Creed, the Gospels, the Acts, the proceedings of the ecumenical councils, the writings of the Church fathers etc. Professions may be written by those who sign them, or by others on their behalf, as for instance was the case with that of Anna Palaiologina *alias* Joanna of Savoy, composed by Gregory Akindynos.¹³

These writings may be studied as sources for the reconstruction of particular events and of the biographies of their authors, and more generally of some aspects of Byzantine society; they can be analysed from a gender-oriented perspective, and in their function as identity-markers, or identity-makers, such as in the case of professions made by converts to Orthodoxy.¹⁴ Another aspect to be taken into consideration, albeit not easily reconstructable, is their performative dimension, as a good part of them were meant to be read aloud or at least signed in public on particular occasions. Indeed what I intend to do here is to focus on professions that were also read independently of their original context of production and fruition, and to reflect on the reasons of their circulation as reading pieces during the Palaiologan period: in a word, I will look at these writings as literary texts.

II. PROFESSIONS AS WRITINGS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Libelli signed by ordinary people generally contained extremely concise assertions, most often so standardized that it is to be assumed that many of them derived from facsimile declarations—examples of which are in fact found in the so called Patriarchal Register of Constantinople, as illustrated in this volume by Christian Gastgeber.¹⁵ The layout of such documents usually consists of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, possibly accompanied by further statements concerning various issues, such as the condemnation of the *Filioque*, of heresies (generally listed on the basis of the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*), or

11. For the episcopal ordination act issued under John XIV (*PLP*, no. 10288), see DARROUZÈS, *Regestes I*, 5, no. 2256; for the addition to the episcopal profession of a condemnation of Barlaam and Akindynos introduced by Isidoros I (*PLP*, no. 3140) see DARROUZÈS, *Regestes I*, 5, no. 2276.

12. The profession by Libadenos (*PLP*, no. 14864) is edited in 'Ο. ΛΑΜΨΙΔΗΣ [O. LAMPSIDES], *Ἀνδρέου Λιβαδηνού βίος καὶ ἔργα*, Ἀθήναι [Athens] 1975, pp. 88–96 and briefly commented on here pp. 220–3. Harmenopoulos' confession is published in PG 150, col. 29B–32C (on Harmenopoulos, see *PLP*, no. 1347).

13. For these two personalities see respectively *PLP*, no. 21348 and no. 495. The declaration written by the *chartophylax* George Moschamper (*PLP*, no. 19344) on behalf of the departing patriarch Gregory II (edited in PG 142, col. 129AB, and by Σ. ΕΥΣΤΡΑΤΙΑΔΗΣ [S. EUSTRATIADES], *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου ἐπιστολαί, Ἐκκλησιαστικός Φάρος* 1-5, 1908-1910, here 5, 1910, p. 500) is not strictly a profession, but rather a patent of Orthodoxy.

14. On the signing of a *libellos* as one of the most common actions (often coupled with rituals and public pronouncements) when converting to Orthodoxy, see S. ALEXOPOULOS, Accepting converts in the orthodox Church : theory and practice, in *Liturgies in East and West* (quoted n. 6), pp. 19–32, here pp. 28–9 (with bibliography); and D. HEITH-STADE, Receiving the non-orthodox : a historical study of Greek orthodox canon law, *Studia canonica* 44/2, 2010, pp. 399–426, here p. 402 and p. 421.

15. C. GASTGEER, *Confessiones fidei* im Patriarchatsregister von Konstantinopel (14. Jahrhundert), in the present volume, pp. 145–89.

of the customs (ἔθιμα) of the Latins.¹⁶ There was no reason for such professions to be read by others than those who subscribed them. Quite different is the fate of some professions written by eminent personalities under the pressure of circumstances, for example the need to react to charges of misbehaviour or impiety, which were so successful in providing comprehensive summaries of the main articles of faith that they became valued reading for generations to come.

As a first example we could quote the profession of faith composed possibly in late 1274 by Patriarch Joseph I Galesiotes,¹⁷ who shortly after retired for he refused to submit to the conditions imposed by the papacy for accepting the Union of Lyons. The text is at the same time a self-apology and an act of accusation against those who wanted to constraint him to adhere to the Latin dogma. Joseph explains why he cannot confess the procession of the Holy Spirit also from the Son, and accuses the Latins as well as the contemporary “new theologians,” as he calls them, of introducing this aberrant notion in the Creed.¹⁸ This text was clearly conceived and meant as a public report made by the author to demonstrate the correctness of his own beliefs and conduct, and in that sense it is a confession of faith; nevertheless, it is a singular one, as Joseph concentrates on only one issue, the most controversial one, i.e. the *Filioque*, and adopts a polemical verve that is rarely found in this kind of text (even in those texts enumerating the “errors” of the Latins): Jean Darrouzès has conveniently defined it as “an anti-Latin manifesto.”¹⁹

A few years later, in 1288, Patriarch George/Gregory II of Cyprus was pushed into a harsh dispute by his opponents, who denounced him for having endorsed (or having inspired, or even having secretly composed) a text containing heterodox allegations on the procession of the Holy Ghost that was divulged by his former pupil Mark the monk. The text that started the *querelle* is now lost, but it is possible to reconstruct its contents by means of Gregory’s and other contemporaries’ testimonies. George/Gregory, a gifted intellectual and refined theologian, issued a profession of faith (ca. late 1288–early 1289)²⁰ that is an elaborate pamphlet directed against his detractors, whom he openly censures for charging him without any proof. Gregory proclaims that his own Orthodoxy regarding the issue of the procession of the Holy Ghost is demonstrated by his writings and by the *Tomos* that he issued in 1285 against Bekkos on the occasion of the council at Blachernae: how could it be possible, Gregory argues, for him to believe in the erroneous teachings that he himself publicly condemned on that occasion? The profession thus opens with an attack on his accusers; then follows the *Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*,

16. Besides the above mentioned chapter by C. GASTGEGER (quoted n. 15), see the survey by E. MITSIOU and J. PREISER-KAPPELLER, Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche in den Urkunden des Patriarchatsregisters von Konstantinopel, in *Sylloge Diplomatico-Palaeographica. 1, Studien zur byzantinischen Diplomatie und Paläographie*, hrsg. von C. GASTGEGER und O. KRESTEN, Wien 2010, pp. 233–88.

17. It is questionable whether the composition dates from 1273, at a time when Joseph I (*PLP*, no. 9072) was under pressure from the unionist party, or from the late 1274, after the Byzantine ambassadors’ return from Lyons together with the papal legates, when the Byzantine Church was officially required to accept the conciliar decisions (indeed J. DARROUZÈS, in V. LAURENT – J. DARROUZÈS, *Dossier grec de l’Union de Lyon [1273–1277]* [AOC 16], Paris 1976, p. 33, is inclined to date it “vers la fin du patriarcat, peu avant le 9 janvier 1275”).

18. LAURENT – DARROUZÈS, *Dossier grec* (quoted n. 17), p. 329, line 5. There exist at least 6 manuscript copies of the text (*ibid.*, p. 31).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

20. The Greek text is in PG 142, col. 247A–252B. A French translation by F. Vinel has been published in the volume edited by J.-C. LARCHET, *La vie et l’œuvre théologique de Georges/Grégoire II de Chypre (1241–1290), patriarche de Constantinople*, Paris 2012, here pp. 301–8.

albeit not quoted *ad litteram*, accompanied by some additional considerations on the two natures, wills and energies in Christ, and on the veneration of images; in the following, Gregory rebuts the decisions of the council of Lyons, especially as concerns the formulation of the procession of the Holy Ghost, and condemns the supporters of that doctrine. He then moves on to a confutation of the accusations of his former disciple Mark, and places anathema on both his writings and their contents; consequently, he introduces his own interpretation of the meaning of the particles ἐκ and διὰ as to the description of the procession of the Spirit from the Father and through the Son. He then concludes by casting an anathema on people who have blamed him for things he has never written or even thought, and therefore have slandered him, just as the Pharisees did to Jesus. As Aristeides Papadakis noted, “the Patriarch’s *Confession* is one of the most verbally successful and succinct synopses of his entire theological construct. It is, in fact, remarkable for its cogency, brevity and clarity [...] No doubt, he wished to make his Orthodoxy public, brief, and as plain as possible.”²¹

As a further example I will mention Gregory Palamas’ confession, which he possibly composed while in prison in the years 1343–4 (in its first redaction it is appended to an epistle of that year addressed to Dionysios, monk of the Katakekryomene monastery in Paroria, Bulgaria), and then probably read in public on the occasion of his consecration in 1347, and again at the 1351 synod.²² The text’s structure is conventional, at least in its first part, which closely follows the layout of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed as to the exposition of the trinitarian dogma (there is no mention of the *Filioque* issue). Palamas then introduces an abridgment of his own teaching on the essence and energies of God, explaining the main point of his speculation, i.e. God being inaccessible in his οὐσία and knowable by his energies; in the following section, he professes his faith in the veneration of images, in the holy cross, in saints’ relics, in the sacraments and in the validity of the seven ecumenical councils and their decisions; he then declares his acceptance of the local synod of 1341, which condemned Barlaam and Akindynos for their impious teachings on the divine energies being created; the concluding statement concerns his faith in the resurrection and in the life to come. Here too the author primarily writes to testify to his Orthodoxy, and to justify his conduct, deeds, and speculations; yet in doing so he provides an effective *summa* of his own theological views: in the words of Aristeides Papadakis, this writing “possesses a precision rarely found in his other works,” for it “does indeed give the essentials of his system, which here receives its most incisive expression.”²³

III. PROFESSIONS AS COMPENDIA OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH

Professions such as the above mentioned ones by Joseph I Galesiotes, Gregory II of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas enjoyed a notable manuscript circulation: a reason for these texts to be copied and read was surely that they were connected to important figures, who

21. A. PAPADAKIS, *Crisis in Byzantium : the Filioque controversy in the patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283-1289)*, New York 1983, p. 120.

22. Edition in *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα*. 2, ἐπιμ. Γ. ΜΑΝΤΖΑΡΙΔΗΣ, Ν. ΜΑΤΣΟΥΚΑΣ, Β. ΨΕΥΤΟΓΚΑΣ [eds. G. MANTZARIDES, N. MATSOUKAS, B. PSEUTOGKAS], Θεσσαλονίκη [Thessalonike] 1966, pp. 494–9; English translation in PAPADAKIS, Gregory Palamas (quoted n. 7), pp. 337–42. Other editions and translations are listed by R. E. SINKIEWICZ, Gregory Palamas, in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*. 2, (xiii-xix^e siècle), sous la dir. de C. G. CONTICELLO et V. CONTICELLO, Turnhout 2002, pp. 131–88, here pp. 143–4 (no. 16).

23. PAPADAKIS, Gregory Palamas (quoted n. 7), p. 335.

could be seen as champions of Orthodoxy; yet what readers looked for in their professions probably had to do not only with their authors' fame, but also with the fact that they were successful compendia of dogmatics.²⁴ This also holds true for several brief expositions of the faith in the form of a profession, or at least circulating—often anonymously—under the title of “professions,” which however were likely not composed to comply with the necessity of delivering an official statement, nor performed or signed on public occasions. Similar texts are frequently encountered in manuscript miscellanies of theological and devotional content.

An exemplar of this category is a (ca. 2,000 word long) treatise that may be dated to the late 13th or early 14th century, seemingly the work of an otherwise unknown Neilos. As to the *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* the work in question is an “umfangreiches Glaubensbekenntnis”: an ample profession of faith.²⁵ Indeed the title introducing the text in the manuscripts varies significantly: according to the two best witnesses, the only ones to mention Neilos as the author, this is an “epistle” (ἐπιστολή) or more generally a “work” (ποίημα) addressed to a certain priest Philippos; in the other witnesses the text is either untitled or goes by titles such as “treatise on the faith” (λόγος περὶ πίστεως, which is possibly derived from a sentence in the prefatory section of the text; the title is here accompanied by a pseudepigraphal attribution to Maximos Planoudes), “[extract] from a theological discussion between Gregory [II] of Cyprus and John Bekkos, who was in communion with the Latins,” “exposition of the orthodox faith” (ἐκθεσις τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, as found in a marginal note), “profession of faith that every Christian must acknowledge and confess” (ὁμολογία πίστεως ἣν ὀφείλει δοξάζειν καὶ ὁμολογεῖν πᾶς ὀρθόδοξος χριστιανός). The text is structured according to a pattern commonly found in longer professions, with a prefatory section containing authorial declarations, followed by the exposition of the principles of the orthodox faith. In the preface the author addresses an unspecified dedicatee (likely the priest, Philippos, mentioned in the title), who asked him to compose a λόγος περὶ τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς πίστεως, i.e. “a treatise on faith according to orthodox Christians.” After a common-place admission of inadequacy, the author explains why in the end he agreed to write such a work. Adherence to tradition seems to be his principal concern, as he overtly states that he would not break with the ἐκκλησιαστικὴ παράδοσις.²⁶ Indeed such declarations are a typical ingredient of dogmatic writings from the *Pege gnoseos* of John of Damascus onwards.²⁷ In the second part, the author first summarizes the Trinitarian

24. It is superfluous to recall the central role of compendia, repertories and anthologies, not only of theology and dogmatics, within the panorama of Byzantine literature and book production (for up-to-date treatments of the issue one may refer to P. MAGDALINO, *Byzantine encyclopaedism of the ninth and tenth centuries*, in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. by J. KÖNIG and G. WOOLF, Cambridge – New York 2013, pp. 219–31; and E. GIELEN, *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*: Joseph Rakendytes’ *Synopsis of Greek learning*, *ibid.*, pp. 259–76).

25. See *PLP*, no. 20059. Edition of the text, on the basis of eight witnesses, in L. SILVANO, Un inedito opuscolo *De fide* d'autore incerto già attribuito a Massimo Planude, *Medioevo greco* 10, 2010, pp. 227–61; for other manuscript copies see *Id.*, Per l'edizione della *Disputa tra un ortodosso e un latinofrone seguace di Becco sulla processione dello Spirito Santo* di Giorgio Moschamper : con un inedito di Bonaventura Vulcanius, *Medioevo greco* 14, 2014, pp. 229–65, here p. 236 and n. 24, p. 239 and n. 35.

26. SILVANO, Un inedito opuscolo (quoted n. 25), p. 252, ll. 29–35.

27. See the well known passage of the first paragraph of the *Dialectica* (*Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos. 1, Institutio elementaris. Capita philosophica (Dialectica)*, besorgt von B. KOTTER [Patristische Texte und Studien 7], Berlin 1969, p. 53, ll. 60–1) in which John states “I shall add nothing on my own, but shall gather together into one those things which have been worked out by the most eminent teachers

doctrine and insists on the attributes of the three divine persons; then moves on to the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father only, which is a constant feature of almost all professions of faith written in the 13th and 14th centuries (with the obvious exception of unionist professions). His insistence on the non-equivalence of the propositions ἐκ and διὰ as to the determination of the Son's role in the derivation of the Spirit (from the Father “and from the Son” vs. from the Father “through the Son”) suggests that he might have been influenced by the theological debates that arose from the disputed teachings of Nikephoros Blemmydes and John Bekkos. The last paragraphs are devoted to the incarnation of the Son, his two natures, wills and energies; a final statement concerns the resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ.

This treatise closely follows the model of John of Damascus' *De fide orthodoxa*—indeed probably the first example of profession of faith in the sense of “exposé du dogme,” i.e. written not out of an immediate practical necessity but rather to function as a reference work.²⁸ John's work provided the pattern for a bipartite treatment encompassing firstly the definition of God, and secondly the economy of salvation. Moreover, it was the principal source of most definitions concerning the various articles of faith. Of course Neilos' profession bears numerous similarities with other dogmatic and devotional writings (other patristic authorities expressly referred to are Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus Confessor, Tarasius), for such assertions as “the Father is not generated and without principle” or notions such as the lists of the hypostatical properties have of course been repeatedly exposed in similar terms by a plethora of Christian and Byzantine writers.²⁹

Not all of these *professiones-expositiones* are as detailed and structured as the above mentioned one. Shorter professions of this kind are, for instance, those found in a manuscript recently studied in depth by Maxim Vandecasteele and Peter Van Deun, the *Reginensis Graecus* 48 of the Vatican Library. The first 200 folia of this thick miscellany, probably the work of a 14th century scribe, contain mostly edifying and theological writings.³⁰ A first profession of faith (entitled ἐκθεσις ἐν ἐπιτομῇ πίστεως) occupies ff. 70^r–71^r. Vandecasteele and Van Deun provided a transcription of the whole text (roughly 400 words), whose author remains unknown. Its first section closely follows the pattern of the Creed (and ends with *amen*); the second part contains some secondary statements (which is often the case with Creed-based professions, as we have seen), in which the author professes his belief in the Gospels, in the Acts of the Apostles, in the decisions of the councils, in the *Synodikon*; he declares blessed those proclaimed blessed

and make a compendium of them” (St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, transl. by F. H. CHASE [The Fathers of the Church 37], Washington DC 1958, quoted from the 1999 reprint, p. 6); and the considerations thereon by H.-G. BECK, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, München 1978, 2. erg. Aufl. 1994, p. 175. For the topos *de ignorantia* see, in the same paragraph of the *Dialectica* (ed. KOTTER, p. 51, ll. 25–7), the following remark: “I have hesitated to undertake this book. Besides this, to tell the truth, I fear to accede to the request, lest I should incur ridicule on the double count of ignorance and of folly” (transl. CHASE, p. 4).

28. On this point see the considerations of P. LEDRUX in JEAN DAMASCÈNE, *La foi orthodoxe. 1–44*, texte critique de l'éd. B. KOTTER (PTS 12), introd., trad. et notes par P. LEDRUX, avec la collab. de V. KONTOUMA-CONTICELLO, G.-M. de DURAND (SC 535), Paris 2010, pp. 31–3.

29. Some formulations, however, occur with very similar phrasing in the profession of Andreas Libadenos (quoted n. 12; see SILVANO, Un inedito opuscolo [quoted n. 25], p. 246 n. 36).

30. M. VANDECASTEELE & P. VAN DEUN, *Le Vaticanus Reginensis gr. 48 : découverte de quelques trésors inconnus*, *Byzantion* 82, 2012, pp. 423–35, here pp. 428–9.

by the Church, he anathematizes those anathematized by the Church; he rejects the devil and for the rest he confirms his complete adherence to the Church's beliefs and decisions.

The same manuscript also contains other texts introduced as professions or concise expositions of faith: the first one, at ff. 11^r–12^r, entitled λίβελος τῆς ἀμωμήτου καὶ ὀρθῆς πίστεως τῶν ὀρθοδόξων χριστιανῶν, i.e. “confession of the blameless and true faith of the orthodox Christians,” begins with the *Credo*-formula (*inc.*: Πιστεύω εἰς ἕνα θεὸν πατέρα ἀγέννητον καὶ ἕνα υἱὸν γεννητόν), and is not an original composition, but indeed an *excerptum* from the treatise *De orthodoxa fide* by Michael the Synkellos (12th century), a tract focused on the Trinitarian dogma. The second one, at ff. 12^r–14^v, entitled σύννοψις σαφῆς καὶ σύντομος καὶ διάγνωσις τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν τῆς ἐν τῇ ἀγίᾳ τριάδι (*inc.*: ὀφειλομένον πιστεῦειν ὡς ἐβαπτίσθημεν) is also an extract, this time from the pseudo-Athanasian *Syntagma ad quendam politicum* (a writing that might be attributed to Stephen, metropolitan of Nicomedia, 10th–11th century).³¹ What is interesting here is that we have an example of the reuse of passages from theological works that circulated under the label of “professions of faith”.

IV. THE USEFULNESS OF PROFESSIONS

At the end of this selective and surely incomplete survey, we may try to answer to the question addressed at the beginning: what is a profession of faith? We have seen that under this designation several types of texts have come down to us, from serial productions such as the most brief forms signed by converts in the Patriarchal Register to more elaborate and to a certain extent original texts, including both summaries or collections of excerpts from other dogmatical works—the adjective *original* meaning in this case that these texts are not *identical* or not completely *identical* to other known ones—,³² and also less conventional professions that should be regarded as significant pieces of theological literature, in which the author's personality clearly emerges.

I have suggested a classification of these texts based on their principal function: respectively, (1) to assert and testify to one person's (or a group of persons') Orthodoxy through a set of formulaic expressions and (2) to explain in a less succinct and laconic way the principal points of the orthodox doctrine. The first should be appropriately referred to as *confessiones fidei*, the second as *expositiones fidei*. Of course such a distinction is not applicable to all cases, as the two functions often overlap and have coexisted since the foundational text of the genre, the Creed of Nicaea, which is indeed at the same time an

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 424–5. The *excerptum* from Michael the Synkellos' work only covers the first two pages of this treatise's edition in B. de MONTFAUCON in *Bibliotheca Coisliniana, olim Segueriana sive manuscriptorum omnium Graecorum, qui in ea continentur, accurata descriptio*..., Parisiis 1715, pp. 90–3 (under the title: Μικαὴλ Συνκέλλου Ἱεροσολύμων λίβελλος περὶ τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως). The edition of Pseudo-Athanasius, *Syntagma ad quendam politicum* (CPG 2286) is found in PG 28, col. 1401D–1405C. These two “professions” are followed by some *excerpta* from an anti-Latin writing: the compiler of this triptych might have wanted to assemble here a positive and a negative confession, the former constituted by the first two pieces, the latter by the refutation of the dogmas of the Latins.

32. Any claim to originality in the sense of innovation or novelty would not only be out of context in such texts, but also suspect of *καινοτομία* or *καινοδοξία*, i.e. deviance from Orthodoxy (see the observations by A. SCHMINCK, *Subsivica Byzantina*. 3, *Καινοτομία*, *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 83, 2015, pp. 140–4; for a recent treatment of the oft-asserted but rarely investigated Byzantine conservatism see A. SPANOS, *Was innovation unwanted in Byzantium?*, in *Wanted : Byzantium : the desire for a lost empire*, ed. by A. NILSSON and P. STEPHENSON [Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 15], Uppsala 2014, pp. 43–56).

official statement and a compendium of articles of faith. A distinction between the two categories can possibly be individuated in the quantity and quality of the information provided, and in the shift from an individual dimension to a more general perspective: while the texts of the first type are marked by the strong relationship to the person(s) who signed and/or read aloud such declarations, having been required or compelled to demonstrate his/her (/their) own Orthodoxy, professions of the second type, whether originating from a constraining necessity or not, may acquire a more general significance, thus becoming appealing to a larger audience.

Needless to say, in the eyes of the Byzantines such a classification might have appeared abstruse or perplexing, as demonstrated by the absence of a universally accepted terminology to distinguish between professions of the two types, which moreover were often copied together in the same miscellanies (for instance ms. *Vindobonensis theologicus* gr. 245 contains the above mentioned profession of Neilos and that of Theodora Palaiologina). What was presumably most important to Byzantine readers was the usefulness (ὠφέλεια) of such condensed expositions of the main dogmas of the faith, which extended well beyond their original context of production: such compendia might serve, for instance, as devotional readings, instructional tools, repertories of arguments to be used in religious controversies, and a source of inspiration for other writings.³³

33. On usefulness (mostly expressed through terms such as *χρήσιμον*, *ὀνήσιμον*, *ὠφέλεια* and likewise, and mostly associated with moral advantage) as a fundamental requirement in order for a work to be considered worth reading and worth circulating see, e.g., the remarks of E. V. MALTESE, *Orizzonti dell'utile nell' "enciclopedismo" bizantino*, in *L'enciclopedismo dall'Antichità al Rinascimento : giornate filologiche genovesi*, a cura di C. FOSSATI, Genova 2011, pp. 33–48. Professions of faith were often included in miscellaneous manuscripts. For instance, several are to be found in juridical manuscripts: see L. BURGMANN *et al.*, *Repertorium der Handschriften des byzantinischen Rechts. 1, Die Handschriften des weltlichen Rechts*, Frankfurt 1995; A. SCHMINCK und D. GETOV, *Repertorium der Handschriften des byzantinischen Rechts. 2, Die Handschriften des kirchlichen Rechts. 1*, Frankfurt 2010, *ad indicem* s.v. "Glaubensbekenntnisse" (I owe this reference and several valuable comments to Andreas Schminck, whom I gladly thank).